

VZCZCXRO3950
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHJS #0039/01 2640840
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 210840Z SEP 07
FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0054
INFO RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0051
RUEHJS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0005
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0004
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0056

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SURABAYA 000039

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, IRN/EAP, DRL/PHD, INL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [KCOR](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH SULAWESI: PLAYING POLITICS WITH SHARIAH LAW

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The November 5 gubernatorial election in Indonesian Vice President Yusuf Kalla's home province of South Sulawesi is both a battle within the local Golkar party and a referendum on the implementation of Shariah law in the province. An internal local Golkar dispute now pits the current governor against the current vice governor, with a third challenger advocating implementation of Shariah law. Local observers are concerned that the candidates are playing politics with an issue without understanding the potential ramifications. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The November 5 gubernatorial election in South Sulawesi originally shaped up to be a battle of local Golkar heavy weights: current Governor Amin Syam, the Chairman of the South Sulawesi Golkar Party against current Vice Governor Syahrul Yasin Limpo, former Secretary of Golkar in the 1990s. A civil servant considered to be a "Golkar man," Syahrul's decision to break ranks and run against Amin Syam, with the full support of the National Mandate Party (PAN), highlights divisions within Golkar in the home region of Indonesia's Vice President and Golkar National Party Chairman Yusuf Kalla.

The Candidates and the Intrigue

¶3. (SBU) The internal Golkar intrigue reached its height when Agus Arifin Nu'mang, the house speaker of the South Sulawesi House of Representatives (DPRD), joined Syahrul's campaign as his running mate. As the result of an internal party dispute, in August 2007, Governor Amin Syam had demoted Agus from Golkar Secretary to Deputy Chairman of Religious Affairs. In response,

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Agus joined Syahrul's campaign to replace Amin Syam. Agus had strongly objected to Amin Syam's decision to break Golkar's commitment to nominate candidates from within the party when he selected Prof Mansyur Ramly as his running mate.

¶4. (SBU) Prof. Mansyur Ramly is the founder of KPPSI, the Komite Persiapan Penerapan Syariah Islam di Sulawesi (Preparation Committee to Implement Islamic Shariah in Sulawesi -- KPPSI). Ramly established KPPSI several years ago to lay the legislative groundwork for the implementation of Shariah law throughout the province by 2008. KPPSI members include academics at prominent South Sulawesi universities, including Hassanuddin University and Muslim University of Indonesia (UMI), as well as

representatives on the local Islamic Council. Prof. Ramly was previously the Rector of UMI. Although not a Golkar party member, Prof. Ramly is Yusuf Kalla's brother-in-law. Amin Syam and Mansyur Ramly have been endorsed by Golkar, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), The Democrats Party, and the National Awakening Party (PKB).

15. (SBU) Amin Syam also faces a challenge from Abdul Aziz Qahhar Mudzakkar, a founding father and the current chief of KPPSI, and his running mate businessman Mubyl Handaling. Aziz initially tried to join Syahrul as his vice gubernatorial running mate, but was rejected by PAN so decided to run for governor himself. Aziz is the son of rebel Kahar Mudzakkar, who led a rebellion against the newly independent state of Indonesia in an effort to establish Sulawesi as an Islamic State. This rebellion kept South and Southeast Sulawesi in a state of civil unrest for years. Kahar was eventually killed by Indonesian troops and the rebellion squashed in the 1950s. Abdul Aziz's candidacy is supported by the United Development Party (PPP), the Crescent Star Party (PBB), the Freedom Bull Nationalist Party (PNBK), and assorted smaller parties.

Shariah as a Political Tool

16. (SBU) In a wide-ranging conversation with Surabaya Principal Office on September 7, Nurman Said, a lecturer of at Ushuluddin Faculty of State Islamic University of Alauddin, and Wahyuddin, a Fullbright grant recipient currently teaching at Makassar Islamic State University of Alauddin, criticized the candidates for using implementation of Shariah law as a political tool in the gubernatorial elections. They noted that Islamic organizations, such as NU, Muhammadiyah and Darul Da'wah wal Irsyad (DDI) advocate strengthening the Islamic ummah through cultural, social and education programs rather than through the implementation of Shariah law.

17. (SBU) They described current efforts in the Bulukumba district of South Sulawesi to implement Shariah law through local bylaws (peraturan daerah -- perda). The local government passed a regulation requiring all Muslim couples to read the

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Koran in Arabic before they can be married in Bulukumba. The district is also trying to implement an economic system based on "zakat (tithing), infaq (monetary charity), and sadaqah (all charity)" and requiring Muslim women, especially government employees, to wear the "hijab." Both Nurman Said and Wahyuddin questioned how the local government could enforce these regulations beyond the government sector. The Bulukumba government deducts 2.5% from the salaries of government employees every month for zakat, but has no method of requiring private sector employees to make similar payments. They suggested that absent any tangible enforcement capacity, the local government relied on the community's moral sanction to force compliance.

Is Implementation Likely?

18. (SBU) Looking at the governor's race, Nurman Said and Wahyuddin speculated that while Amin Syam would give every appearance of supporting the implementation of Shariah law in order to attract KPPSI voters, he would be unlikely to follow through. Abdul Aziz would undoubtedly try to implement Shariah law throughout South Sulawesi, although they suggested that Abdul Aziz himself did not believe following through on this commitment would be easy. Supported by PAN, the National Awakening Party (PKB), and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), Syahrul Yasin would be unlikely to support efforts to implement Shariah law. According to the Chief Editor of Fajar, part of the Jawa Pos Group, Governor Amin Syam is the front runner in recent polls, but given Golkar's divided loyalties, the election's outcome remains unclear.

MCCLELLAND